



L: Kerry Tribe, *H.M.*, 2009; C-print; 30 x 30 inches; edition 2 of 5, 2 APs

R: *H.M.*, 2009; installation view; courtesy 1301PE, Los Angeles; photos by Fredrik Nilsen

LOS ANGELES

Kerry Tribe
1301PE

Henry Gustav Molaison died of respiratory failure in 2008. He was eighty-two years old. Known as HM, Molaison had no memory of the world after 1957. Doctors had to remove part of his hippocampus in order to rid him of debilitating seizures, saving his life but leaving him unable to form long-term memories. From that day forward, he could only mentally access twenty seconds of lived memory. Kerry Tribe's recent exhibition at 1301PE uses Molaison's medical condition as the starting point for a complicated analysis of impermanence, absence and the frailty of memory. The result is a grouping of images that, like memory itself, are hard to pin down, shift constantly and demand a double take.

The show's focal point is located on the gallery's second floor, where Tribe's eighteen-minute film, *HM*, plays in duplicate on side-by-side projectors linked by a celluloid Möbius strip; each section of film is replayed twenty seconds after it first appears. This presentation literally folds back on itself, making the viewer constantly revisit the recent past while harboring associations contingent on the present. The projections replicate HM's condition and allow the viewer to experience a passage from one memory register to another—an act that the film's subject could not perform.

Structured around an interview between Molaison (or, perhaps, an actor playing him) and an off-screen narrator/interviewer, the film charts HM's personal history as well as his role as a medical subject, detailing how he continually tried to remake his missing memory to suit any question asked of him. For instance, for Molaison, the Gulf War was between the United States, Mexico and Cuba. People who see him every day are rationalized as old high-school friends and, of course, he thinks he is much

younger than he really is. The film also uses animation to discuss the chemical properties of memory and weaves in the narrator's own history, along with archival photographs and dates outside of HM's memory register.

Intriguingly, the film also informs us that HM still has the ability to learn new repetitive tasks through the use of procedural memory, as illustrated in a scene where he traces a metal star using reflection as a guide. This testing tool is featured in a photograph on the gallery's ground floor—a kind of testament to the medical breakthroughs unleashed by his touch. The ground floor also features a straightforward photograph of Molaison and small scientific diagrams, as well as strange letterpress images of blank crossword puzzles devoid of lines, words or numbers. Like an encryption with no key, these images at first seem impenetrable and could easily be disregarded as such. But, as the film tells us, HM loved crossword puzzles, presumably because completing them might have been like working with an invisible collaborator.

Tribe's show is brilliantly subtle but not reductive, educational while avoiding didacticism. It is impossible to leave the show and not see the work as an homage to a man whose fractured memory lays our own fragile reminiscences bare—shifting, malleable touchstones for a present that is always and forever just out of reach.

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